

Ski race will bear twins' names

Heather Rule
hrule@postbulletin.com

Kevin Dammen loved the outdoors, including his favorite activities of cross-country skiing, running and kayaking. It led to him and his twin brother, Kyle Dammen, to put together a cross-country ski race in February 2009 at the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center.

What has become an annual race now will be named after the brothers, a decision formally approved by Austin's Parks, Recreation and Forestry board at its meeting Wednesday. Kevin Dammen was 20 years old when he died June 7, 2011, in a kayaking accident on Lake Superior.

"That's a great honor," said Dana Steichen, Kevin and Kyle's mother. "That means a lot to us.

"It's really neat that they would go ahead and name it after him and Kyle."

Money raised from the ski race will go toward a mentorship named after Kevin Dammen. The naming of the race and mentorship also were approved by Friends of the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center.

Kevin Dammen was a 2009 graduate of Austin High School and was majoring in computer science at Winona State University, where he also competed on the cross-country team.

Cross-country skiing was truly one of the boys' great loves and activities, Steichen said, even though it was something they didn't get into until later in high school.

They took the race in their hands, "and they made it successful," she said. Kevin just wanted people to get outside, his mother said.

"It didn't matter if you're a good skier or not a good skier, but as long as you're out there trying," Steichen said. "He just wanted more people to appreciate the outdoors and nature and get out there and be active.

"He did not like to just sit home and be cooped up in the house."

For the first three years of the ski race, Kevin and Kyle Dammen returned all proceeds to the nature center. Their main concern was that people get out and experience cross-country skiing and the nature center.

"It makes me proud," Steichen said. "I feel lucky and blessed to have those guys for my sons, to be their mom."

Initially, nature center director Larry Dolphin spoke to Kevin's family about the idea for the naming of the race and mentorship. Steichen kept coming back to the same phrase to describe this idea: It's an honor. She thinks Kevin, although humbled, would agree.

"Kevin never looked for attention," Steichen said. "He'd be honored by that, but he wouldn't have expected it at all. He'd be surprised."